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C O N F I D E N T I A L ZAGREB 000834

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE (ENGLISH) AND EUR/RPM (SHINAGEL)
USNATO FOR BRUCE ROGERS

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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [HR](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: CROATIAN OFFICIALS REACT TO NATO REVIEW

REF: A. USNATO 429

[1](#)B. ZAGREB 817

Classified By: Poloff A.F.Godfrey for reasons 1.5 (b,d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) GoC officials were both encouraged and disappointed with their second annual review by NATO's North Atlantic Council of Croatia's progress towards membership. They were encouraged by new optimism about Croatia expressed by many allies, citing that the International Staff's report noted progress on tough issues. But GoC officials disheartened by what they perceived as a new position by the U.S., Croatia's former champion at NATO. Croatian officials believe the USG has changed the standard by which it is measuring cooperation with ICTY. We encouraged Croatia to continue its progress toward NATO membership, stressed that the U.S. has always insisted on full cooperation with international obligations and underscored the U.S. Mission's message at the NAC (ref a) that the continued fugitive status of ICTY indictee Gotovina is an obstacle to accession. End Summary.

Croatia reacts to NATO's "Report Card"

[1](#)2. (C) Croatia took away mixed messages from its April 30 "26 1" Membership Action Plan (MAP) progress review at NATO's North Atlantic Council (NAC). In the week following the NAC meeting, we met with Croatia's MAP coordinator Pjer Simunovic and with Davor Stier, the lead political officer at Croatia's mission to NATO. GoC officials were pleased by most allies' recognition that Croatia was making good progress on sensitive issues in the political chapter of MAP. They appreciated the constructive, but tough assessment of the work the GoC needs to do on defense reform, military downsizing and restructuring and also on judicial reform.

Croatia: USG Moved the Goalposts on ICTY Cooperation

[1](#)3. (C) According to Steir, the most disheartening message came from the U.S. representative to the NAC. Most Allies took note of the ICTY Chief Prosecutor's positive assessment of Croatia's cooperation, noting the immediate transfer of eight indictees and the ICTY's assessment of full cooperation on document requests to the GoC. According to Steir, it was the GoC's firm understanding that the USG had previously used the ICTY's assessment as its own measure of Croatia's cooperation. Now that Del Ponte judges Croatia as "fully cooperating," Stier continued, the U.S. has changed its standard, insisting that Gotovina must be in The Hague before the U.S. will allow Croatia to move forward toward membership. Steir reiterated FM Zuzul's plea at the NAC that Croatia "must not be held hostage to one man."

"A Blow to Croatia's Atlantic Movement"

[1](#)4. (C) Simunovic said that the new U.S. position at the NAC was a blow to Croatia's Atlanticists and could dampen energy in Zagreb for Croatia's NATO bid. The EC's "avis" was not seen as a finish line, but as a starting point. With this concrete signal, Croatia's reformers have a new tool with which to push ahead on reforms relating to the EU. According to Simunovic, the message to those in Croatia who are responsible for managing the NATO bid was the opposite: despite GoC efforts and measurable achievements, Croatia is no closer to NATO membership.

"Give Us a 'Carrot' in the Istanbul Communique, Please"

[1](#)5. (C) Simunovic and Stier asked for a strong message at the Istanbul summit which could re-energize Croatia's bid for NATO and boost public support for membership the way the EC's "avis" had for Croatia's EU bid. More than anything, Simunovic said he fears that the Croatian public could develop a "who needs NATO anyway" attitude; support for the tough reforms which are not part of EU requirements --

especially in defense -- could fall away.

16. (C) Stier said Croatia was considering proposing draft language for the Summit communique to various delegations at NATO. He said that proposed language would not include a call for an invitation -- Allies have been clear that the MAP aspirants should not expect that -- but would suggest that heads of state hail the progress of the three and direct the NAC to assess their suitability for an invitation after the next MAP review cycle in Spring 2005.

17. (C) For our part, we encouraged Croatia to continue its efforts in NATO's MAP and to address all of the issues raised by allies at the April 30 review. As always, we reiterated to our interlocutors that Croatia should take all measures possible to deliver Gotovina to ICTY custody.

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